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SUBJECT: MEDIA PLAY 6/1-7: BUSH-MACHADO (SUMATE) MEETING  
RAISES OPPOSITION HOPE AND BOLIVARIAN BACKLASH IN PRESS

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SUMMARY  
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1. The May 31 meeting between Maria Corina Machado, the director of Venezuelan pro-democracy NGO SUMATE and President Bush has created outraged reactions from Chavez supporters. Comments made by senior government officials claim Machado is trying to garner support from the U.S. in preparation for a presidential run in the next election. Further, they claim that Machado is allying herself with the U.S. for financial support in order to get Chavez out of office while trying to detract attention from Posada Carriles. Most members of the opposition say that Machado should be praised for strategically attracting more attention to Chavez's abuses of power so that international organizations can intervene, such as the OAS. However, a few have expressed disappointment. Government owned VTV is running commercials mocking the meeting between President Bush and Maria Corina Machado. They are using a photo of the meeting with graphics showing President Bush giving Machado money from a suitcase. The voiceover has her promising that they will get Chavez this time and Bush responding in Spanish that he already has given her enough money to build a condominium. The government is also running newspaper ads claiming Machado is a paid agent of the U.S.

2. EL NACIONAL (liberal/opposition, circ. 120,000) June 3 lead editorial headline: "Diplomacy and a Local Comedy" QUOTE: "It is surprising to see Venezuelan government officials' reaction to Maria Corina Machado's meeting with President Bush. As relations between Venezuela and the United States stand, it should not be a surprise that the U.S. President wanted to see a personality from the political opposition to the Venezuelan regime, in order to get first-hand information on the frequent obstructions to democracy in Venezuela."

June 2 "Maria Cristina, What Bother!" column by Milagros Socorro

QUOTE: "Why does Maria Corina Machado have to go and tell Bush that we, Venezuelans, 'wish to live in freedom and democracy'? Doesn't she believe in the results of our democratic struggles; she has to go and seek a sort of father or referee that serves as an intermediary to solve our problems?"

3. EL UNIVERSAL (conservative/opposition/paper of record, circ. 120,000) June 4 opinion column by Agustin Blanco Munoz "ambUSHed"

Quote: ".for now this has nothing to do with trying to promote presidential candidate but rather promote a reaction in favor of Sumate so that it will become linked to [Bush's own] 'policy of democracy and liberty,' which the Bush administration will promote for Venezuela."

June 3 column by Argelia Rios, "Change of Scene?"

QUOTE: "Venezuelan democracy is interested in having everyone concerned about it. Perhaps, Sumate can channel that desire. It is clear that the ruling party is afraid there is something behind her: the Bolivarian diplomacy has just received a defeat."

Column by Political analyst Carlos Blanco, "Maria Corina is Driving the Government Officials Crazy"

QUOTE: "Of course, the meeting between Maria Corina Machado and George Bush is highly symbolic; it means that the world superpower recognizes Venezuelans' democratic fights. And, most importantly, it has put these fights in the world spotlight. Most of the opposition felt that this meeting meant some recognition of their struggle."

4. DIARIO VEA (pro-government, circ. 25,000) June 6 lead editorial headline "The Imperial Threat"

QUOTE: "Venezuela has escaped from the corral and Mr. Bush will do all in his power, without scruples or limits, in order to bring it back to the fold. That is what is behind the White House's message in meeting with Maria Corina Machado."

June 6 Stumbling Block column by (pseudonym) 'Marciano' title: "Lessons of an interview"

QUOTE: "[in inviting] the director of Sumate they presumably thought they were giving a rebuff to Chavez. What balls Bush and his advisors have! How clueless they are. If that

is the reason for the meeting in the White House you can see that they do not know Chavez. These provocations roll off his back..."

June 3 Stumbling Block column by (pseudonym) 'Marciano'  
title: "Shaking Hands"

QUOTE: "Mr. Bush must be thinking that his meeting with her at the White House was a master move. Maisto and Noriega must have been exultant: they have just built the alternative to Chavez.. The empire now had its Violeta Chamorro.. Surely that night Miss Rice went to sleep

peacefully, dreaming of Uncle Tom."

June 3 lead editorial headline: "They Simply Stink"

QUOTE: "Telling the world: 'This is our agent,' is what happened with the Sumate director, Maria Corina Machado's visit to the oval office of the White House.. In addition, admitting, like U.S. senator (sic) Frank Wolf did, to the fact that Sumate is funded by the United States and that they are going to increase its funds is the straw that broke the camel's back...Bush and his followers prepared the scene at the oval office of the White House with premeditation and treachery."

June 2 lead editorial headline: "Sumate in the Oval Office"

QUOTE: "Maria Corina Machado's visit to President Bush in Washington shows who Sumate works for. There's no room for doubt, now. Maria Corina Machado and Sumate directly represent US interests. Without a mask; Sumate is funded and sponsored by the American government."

15. EL NUEVO PAIS (opposition sensationalist, circ. 4,000)

June 2 "Maria Corina Machado's Second Round" column by Journalist Patricia Poleo (opposition journalist appealing a conviction for criminal libel for her reporting on the Minister of Interior).

QUOTE: "Without a doubt, Maria Corina Machado has dealt a blow on Chavismo and they cannot dissemble about how much it hurts them. The meeting between Maria Corina Machado and the US President, George Bush, is important because she has precise information on why there is no democracy in Venezuela. Besides, the meeting has had a psychological impact for both sides. Hugo Chavez has never been received by Bush and neither has any member of the National Executive."

June 3 column by MAS (opposition) legislator, Leopoldo Puchi "Maria Corina Machado and George Bush"

QUOTE: "In this sense, the fact that Sumate representative has been received at the White House, is not simply a demonstration of support but it is also an expression of a strategic line of action, structured around the issue.. At first blush, the Venezuelan opposition might feel satisfaction because this meeting could be interpreted as greater interest by Washington in the Venezuelan situation. However, US efforts could be more problematic than positive if the Venezuelan opposition appears as a US geopolitical chess piece and if a confrontation posing a threat to the integrity of the nation breaks out."

REPORTE (economy-orientated, circ. 5,000) June 2 "Ohh,.a Woman!" column by Rodolfo Schmidt

QUOTE: "A significant detail: the interview was the product of a surprise invitation from the White House and not the product of a complicated diplomatic move. Stephen Hadley, National security advisor, and Andrew Card, chief of staff of the White House, participated in the meeting. In other words, the United States already did what it had to do during this phase: to show its unequivocal support to democracy in Venezuela."

16. QUOTES FROM GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS: Interior Minister Jesse Chacon: "The U.S. has two ways of intervening in other countries: one is armed intervention and the other is through non-governmental organizations, that are front maintained by the U.S. government."

Foreign Minister Ali Rodriguez: "This could be said to be a launching pad for Mrs. Machado for the next elections with the full support of the American government." "Sumate is simply an agency of the United States in Venezuela." "It is a way for the U.S. to intervene in the internal affairs of Venezuela."

Pro-Chavista deputy Iris Varela: "[Washington] is trying to distract attention from its efforts to protect Luis Posada Carriles."

Jorge Valero, Venezuelan Ambassador to the OAS: "Machado is well known in political circles in Venezuela as a discredited person without real leadership, who is financed by the Department of State."

Saul Ortega, ruling party MVR deputy and head of foreign affairs committee of Parliament: "The Bush-Machado meeting confirms the thesis that the United States was behind the April 2002 coup d'etat."

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COMMENT

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17. Both government and opposition have reacted predictably,

including the government funded attack ads and the dismay of some in the opposition over Machado's suddenly high profile. Some of the more interesting comments come from the pro-Chavez daily Diario Vea's column "Stumbling Block" by

`Marciano.' Marciano indicates that Machado is now Venezuela's Violeta Chamorro and assures that Chavez was not bothered by the meeting. Many Venezuelan news executives believe that Marciano is really Vice President Rangel. Chavez made no mention of the meeting nor Machado in the June 5 Alo Presidente. End Comment

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